



# RIO RANCHO PUBLIC SCHOOLS

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"Student Excellence"

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Dear Parent or Guardian,

The New Mexico Department of Public Education has released its annual school ratings for 2008. The ratings are based on the results of the New Mexico Standards-Based Assessments (NMSBA), achievement tests given to students in grades 3-9 and grade 11 in the spring of 2008.

Schools may achieve a rating of "Meets AYP" or "AYP Not Met". AYP stands for "adequate yearly progress", and refers to the federally-mandated goal that all students demonstrate proficiency in reading and math by the year 2014. The academic data is reported in terms of the percentage of students meeting or exceeding proficiency targets.

Schools that do not make AYP for two consecutive years enter the school improvement cycle. Independence High School falls into this category and, having been in school improvement for four years, has now been designated as "restructuring" State law, in accordance with the mandates of the federal No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB), establishes steps that schools in restructuring must take to inform parents of this designation and to provide parents with the opportunity to transfer their child to a school that has not been found "in need of improvement" (referred to as "school choice").

As NM Education Secretary Veronica Garcia noted in announcing this year's statewide test results, the fact that a school has been found to be "in need of improvement," does not make it a bad school. The state's school accountability system includes as many as 37 separate measures for each school. If a school does not reach targets in any one of these measures, the school does not make AYP.

## How Did Our School Do?

### Independence High School

**Proficiency:** Expressed in terms of the percentage of students in a subgroup demonstrating proficiency in the subject area.  
A school meets AYP if the percentage of students demonstrating proficiency meets or exceeds state targets.  
**Participation:** Indicates whether at least 95% of students in the subgroup completed the test.

Percentage of indicators meeting AYP: 80% (4 of 5 rated areas)

School rating: AYP Not Met		School improvement status: Restructuring I (R-1)						Years in school improvement: 4		
Subgroup	All students	Caucasian	African-American	Hispanic	Asian/Pacific	American Indian	English-language learners	Students with disabilities	Economically disadvantaged	Additional indicator: Graduation
Mathematics proficiency	-2.0 AYP Not Met	**	**	**	**	**	**	**	**	Meets AYP
Reading Proficiency	21.4 Meets AYP	**	**	**	**	**	**	**	**	
Mathematics Participation	Meets AYP	**	**	**	**	**	**	**	**	
Reading Participation	Meets AYP	**	**	**	**	**	**	**	**	

\*\*Subgroups with fewer than 25 students do not receive an AYP designation based on the percentage of students demonstrating proficiency.  
Subgroups with fewer than 40 students do not receive an AYP designation for participation.

## What we are doing about it:

After failing to make AYP in any area last year, Independence made it in four of five possible areas this year, a notable achievement. Independence High School students and staff faced many challenges last year, when the school lacked a permanent facility and shared space with Rio Rancho Cyber Academy. Students and teachers rose to the challenge and Independence showed substantial gains in reading. Improving math scores has continued to be more difficult.

For the most part, the requirements of No Child Left Behind do not reward schools whose students make gains, only those that reach the targets. However, NCLB and state law allow for a "safe harbor" provision, which permits schools to make AYP in a subject area if scores increase by more than 10%. That happened in reading at IHS last year, and so IHS made AYP in reading. Independence also made AYP this year in participation on the test --95% of students must substantially complete the test or the school does not make AYP. Finally, Independence made AYP for its graduation rate this year after failing to do so last year, and we are very proud of our seniors who stayed the course and earned a diploma.

Alternative schools like Independence provide students who might otherwise drop out of school with a chance to earn a diploma. The provisions of NCLB require that all students reach rigorous, grade-level standards in reading and math. However, many students come into Independence with skills that are years below grade level. Simply getting back to grade level is a great achievement for these students. Independence HS gives students the opportunity to earn a diploma, acquire skills to succeed in college or the workplace, and provides support for working students, student parents, and other students who face challenges in earning a diploma.

In the next year, Independence HS will provide the following programs to help students reach grade level competence in the core subjects:

- Daily Advisory meetings with staff to review student progress -- these will help staff members work together to provide students with the support that they need
- Reading classes to help bring students up to grade level in reading
- Math remediation classes to help students who are behind progress towards grade level

Independence now has a permanent home which will provide stability for students and staff and will provide appropriate facilities for its culinary arts, film, and healthcare (Certified Nurse Assistant) programs. It will also provide the opportunity to expand career-pathway programs in the future.

## How Our Schools Compare:

The following chart compares the overall performance of Independence HS with other high schools in Rio Rancho and with the state averages:

High School	Percentage of all students scoring at the "proficient" level or above		Data on all of our schools may be accessed through the RRPS Web site: <a href="http://www.rrps.net/Achievement/Instruction/08SchoolAYPReports.htm">http://www.rrps.net/Achievement/Instruction/08SchoolAYPReports.htm</a> This site also includes links to the Public Education Department (PED) reports containing complete data for each Rio Rancho school. Data for all schools in New Mexico is available on the PED Web site, <a href="http://www.ped.state.nm.us">www.ped.state.nm.us</a> .
	Reading	Math	
Independence HS	21.4%	2.0%	
Rio Rancho Mid-High (grades 8-9)	76.4%	62.2%	
Rio Rancho High (grades 10-12)	58.4%	52.8%	
Rio Rancho Cyber Academy	69.6%	17.4%	
State average (all schools)	53.3%	36.0%	

## **School Improvement and Your Options for School Choice:**

Schools that do not make AYP for two consecutive years enter the school improvement cycle. Once entering this cycle, schools must make AYP for two consecutive years in order to leave school improvement status. This is becoming increasingly difficult, because each year the targets schools must meet in terms of the percentage of the students who demonstrate proficiency are higher (this year, by 11%). With only a couple of exceptions, all of New Mexico's large high schools are now in some phase of school improvement.

Each year a school does not meet AYP targets, the federal law requires additional changes and interventions. Independence High School is now in what is called "Restructuring I". While this sounds ominous, we started making changes to our educational program more than a year ago and are already seeing improvement.

When a school is in any phase of "school improvement," parents must be offered the option to transfer their child to another school within the school district that has not been identified for improvement. Currently, Independence offers few alternatives for transfer, since the district has no high schools that are not in school improvement status. However, parents may consider transferring their child to Rio Rancho High School or the Rio Rancho Cyber Academy. Both schools are in school improvement but offer programs that may meet their child's needs:

- Rio Rancho High School offers a comprehensive high school program including a full program of electives, athletics, fine arts, and extracurricular activities. It should be noted that RRHS requires 28 credits for graduation.
- The Rio Rancho Cyber Academy offers educational programs delivered online, with support from the school's teachers and lab facilities.

If the demands for transfers exceed the available space in the school in which students can be safely accommodated, the priority is to accommodate low-achieving low-income students. Students who elect to transfer to Rio Rancho HS and are eligible for bus transportation to RRHS may ride the bus to school. Bus transportation to Rio Rancho Cyber Academy will be accommodated if possible.

**If you would like to exercise the transfer option, please pick up a transfer form from the school office, fill it out, and return it to the school office within 30 days of the receipt of this letter.**

Test scores are just one factor in determining if a given school is the best place for your child. If you have questions about your child's or our school's test results, please feel free to contact me. We will be glad to work with you and your child to help you understand the results and determine whether your child would be best served by remaining at Independence or by transferring to another school.

In addition to offering parents the option to transfer, schools in the school improvement cycle must also schedule a public meeting to provide an explanation of what the identification means and why the school was identified as a school in need of improvement. **This meeting will be held Tuesday, September 9, 6:30 PM - 8:00 PM at the Rio Rancho Mid-High Cafeteria, 1600 40<sup>th</sup> St. NE.** At the meeting, the school must provide data for other schools in the district and statewide, and an explanation of how parents can become involved in addressing the issues.

The law also requires the school to evaluate and revise its Educational Plan for Student Success (EPSS), a process our school has always followed. Finally, the school is required to develop an "alternative governance structure" with input from parents and teachers. This plan could include: replacing all or most of the staff as allowed by law, turning over management of the public school to the state public education department,

making other governance changes, or implementing any other major restructuring of the school's governance that is consistent with the principles of restructuring.

Whether you decide to request a transfer for your child or not, we encourage you to take an active role in your child's education. Parents are our partners in supporting school improvement and play a very important role in their child's success in school. Here are some ways you can help.

- Attend the public meeting on our school's academic status on **Tuesday, September 9, 6:30 PM - 8:00 PM at the Rio Rancho Mid-High Cafeteria, 1600 40<sup>th</sup> St. NE.**
- **Become involved with your School Advisory Council and/or the Parent-Teacher Association (PTA)**
- Communicate regularly with your child's teachers
- Encourage your child to become involved with extracurricular school clubs or activities such as athletics or music, or with community or church groups. Students who feel connected to school and are involved with their school and community tend to do better academically.
- Help your child at home with reading and math
- Make sure your child attends class and comes to school well-rested, fed, and ready to learn

Please remember that if you do not complete and return the transfer application **within 30 days**, your child will remain at Independence. As noted above, if you have any questions or need additional information about your school choice options, please feel free to contact me.

Sincerely,

David Latham  
Principal, Independence HS